

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: STUDENTS TO TEACH DEMOCRACY IN THE VILLAGES

SUMMARY: THE STATE UNIVERSITIES BUREAU (SUB), IN COOPERATION WITH THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT), HAS BEGUN A DEMOCRACY TEACHING PROGRAM WHICH WILL SEND STUDENT VOLUNTEERS INTO THAI VILLAGES. DR. AROON SORATHET, SUB MINISTER, PRESIDED OVER THE OPENING CEREMONIES OF THE GOVERNMENT PROGRAM AT HUKAPONG RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER, CHA-AM DISTRICT OF PHETBURI PROVINCE, ON MARCH 17. AT THIS CENTER, AND OTHERS TO BE SET UP ACROSS THE COUNTRY, THE STUDENT VOLUNTEERS TAKE TRAINING IN THE BASIC METHODS OF APPROACHING FARMERS. THE REAL OBJECT OF THE PROGRAM SEEMS LESS TO TEACH DEMOCRACY THAN TO GIVE THAILAND'S BANGKOK BASED STUDENT POPULATION UPCOUNTRY EXPERIENCE, AND LET THEM EXPEND THEIR EXCESS ENERGIES OUTSIDE BANGKOK. END SUMMARY.

1. THE RTG PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT CONDUCTED A TOUR FOR A BUSLOAD OF DIPLOMATIC AND PRESS INVITEES TO THE OPENING OF THE GOVERNMENT'S DEMOCRACY TEACHING PROGRAM IN PHETBURI PROVINCE MARCH 17. DR. SOMSAK XUTO, CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY POLITICAL
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SCIENCE LECTURER, EXPLAINED TO THE GROUP THAT THE OBJECT OF THE

GOVERNMENT PROGRAM WAS TO DEVELOP BETTER UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN STUDENTS AND VILLAGERS, AND TO GIVE STUDENTS A FEELING FOR RURAL PROBLEMS. THE PROGRAM ALSO HOPES TO STIMULATE VILLAGER INTEREST IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS. SOMSAK POINTED OUT THAT STUDENTS WILL ARRIVE IN THEIR ASSIGNED VILLAGES IN APRIL. HE SAID THAT THE PROGRAM ORGANIZERS ENCOURAGE THE STUDENTS TO RETURN TO THEIR HOME VILLAGES. THE PROGRAM ITSELF STRESSES SENSITIZING THE STUDENTS TO VILLAGER PROBLEMS. DURING THE TWO-WEEK TRAINING COURSE AT HUPKAPONG RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER, INSTRUCTORS WILL ADMONISH THE STUDENTS TO CONSIDER THEMSELVES "THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF THE VILLAGERS." THEY LIVE WITH THE VILLAGERS AND HAVE A SMALL STIPEND TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE HOUSEHOLD IN WHICH THEY ARE STAYING SO THAT THE VILLAGERS DO NOT BEAR THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF THEIR GUESTS. THE STUDENTS MUST ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO EVERY DAY FAMILY CHORES AND OTHERWISE SEE TO IT THAT THEY DO NOT INCONVENIENCE THE VILLAGERS. THE BASIC GUIDELINE IS "TO BE GOOD LISTENERS." AS PART OF THE SENSITIVITY TRAINING, VILLAGE CHIEFS AND DISTRICT OFFICERS COME TO THE TRAINING CENTERS AND TALK TO THE STUDENTS ABOUT PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO THE RURAL POPULATION. THE PROGRAM STRESSES PROPER MANNERS AND DEPORTMENT. THE THEORETICAL CLASSES PROVIDE TRAINING ON HOW TO HANDLE VILLAGER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE EVENTS OF OCTOBER, AND ABOUT THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE NEW GOVERNMENTAL ERA. SOMSAK SAID THAT THE STUDENTS ALSO ARE TRAINED TO REPLY TO "TRICK" QUESTIONS THAT INSURGENT CADRE THEY ENCOUNTER MIGHT ASK.

2. DURING A LATER PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH AN EMBASSY OFFICER, SOMSAK SAID THAT THE OBJECT OF THE PROGRAM WAS NOT SO MUCH TO TEACH DEMOCRACY AS TO GIVE THE BANGKOK BASED STUDENTS SOME AWARENESS THAT THAILAND IS NOT JUST BANGKOK. HE SAID THAT THE PROGRAM DOES NOT DO ANYONE ANY HARM AND WON'T CLAIM GREAT SUCCESSES, BUT IT CERTAINLY SHOULD OPEN SOME STUDENTS' EYES. HE VIEWED THE WHOLE PROJECT AS AN EDUCATIONAL PROCESS DIRECTED TOWARD TEACHING THE STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR OWN COUNTRY. HE SAID THAT THE PROGRAM WOULD PUBLISH STUDENT REPORTS ON VILLAGER PROBLEMS SO THAT ELECTIONEERING POLITICIANS COULD NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE STUDENTS' WORK.

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3. SOMBAT THAMRONGTHANYAWONG, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT), GAVE AN ADDRESS DURING THE INAUGURAL CEREMONIES STRESSING THAT THE PROGRAM SHOULD ASSIST THE STUDENTS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THEIR RURAL BRETHREN. HE MENTIONED THAT THE STUDENTS SHOULD CONDUCT THEMSELVES AS CHILDREN OF THE VILLAGERS AND PUT THEMSELVES AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE VILLAGE

FAMILIES. HE SAID THAT SOME OF THE VOLUNTEERS HAD ASKED TO BE STATIONED IN INSECURE DISTRICTS WITHIN THE KINGDOM, AND THAT THOSE STUDENTS HAD A PARTICULAR RESPONSIBILITY TO BE HONEST AND FORTHCOMING IN DISCUSSING THE PROBLEMS OF THE NATION WITH THE VILLAGERS.

4. DR. AROON SORATHET, MINISTER OF THE STATE UNIVERSITIES BUREAU (SUB), WHO GAVE THE INAUGURAL SPEECH, PRIVATELY TOLD US THAT THIS PROGRAM WAS BASICALLY THE STUDENTS' IDEA. HE MENTIONED THAT IN THE INITIAL ENTHUSIASM AFTER THE EVENTS OF OCTOBER THE NSCT SPENT SOME OF ITS OWN FUNDS ON A DEMOCRACY TEACHING PROGRAM. THIS PROGRAM FAILED FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS, BUT THE STUDENTS WANTED TO TRY AGAIN. LAST DECEMBER THE STUDENTS APPROACHED SUB ABOUT BEGINNING ANOTHER PROGRAM. SUB SUBMITTED A PROPOSAL TO THE CABINET WHICH DR. CHAI-ANAN SUMUTYANIT, WHO WAS ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFTING COMMITTEE, BLOCKED BECAUSE HE WANTED TO CONTROL THE PROGRAM. THERE APPARENTLY WAS SOME STUDENT RESISTANCE TO CHAI-ANAN'S IDEAS SO THE NSCT AGAIN CAME TO SUB AND ASKED TO RESUBMIT THE ORIGINAL PROPOSAL TO THE CABINET. AROON SAID THAT PRIME MINISTER SANYA FINALLY "ORDERED" CHAI-ANAN TO COOPERATE WITH SUB.

5. VARIOUS UNIVERSITY LECTURERS SUPERVISE THE GOVERNMENT PROGRAM. DURING THE NEXT TWO WEEKS SOME 500 STUDENTS WHO WILL BE TEAM LEADERS RECEIVE THEIR BASIC TRAINING. UP TO 5000 STUDENTS WILL JOIN THE TEAM LEADERS AND TAKE UP THEIR ASSIGNMENTS IN OVER 500 CANTONS (TAMBONS) THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. AROON TOLD US THAT STUDENT VOLUNTEERS WOULD GO TO INSECURE AREAS SUCH AS NAKAE DISTRICT OF NAKHON PHANOM PROVINCE. THE ORGANIZERS SPECIFICALLY INTEND THAT THE STUDENTS

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WITHDRAW FROM THE VILLAGES BEFORE ELECTIONEERING BEGINS. THE FOUR WEEK PROGRAM THUS WILL COVER THE MONTH OF APRIL.

6. CONCLUSION: THE BENEFICIARIES OF THE GOVERNMENT PROGRAM ARE THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES. THE DEMOCRACY TEACHING PROGRAM ORGANIZERS' INTENT IS TO GIVE BANGKOK BASED STUDENTS SOME PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE IN RURAL THAI AFFAIRS. THE ORGANIZERS HOPE THAT AS A RESULT OF THIS EXPERIENCE THE STUDENTS WILL BE MORE SYMPATHETIC TO THE PROBLEMS OF RURAL THAILAND, ESPECIALLY IF THEY BECOME GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. SOMSAK EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT SOME OF THESE STUDENTS WILL BECOME POLITICIANS WITHIN THE NEXT TEN YEARS AND HAVE A MORE NATIONALISTIC ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PROBLEMS OF THEIR COUNTRY. THIS THAI

"HSIA FANG" PROGRAM, HOWEVER, IS CONSERVATIVELY BRED AND RUN. THE GOVERNMENT AND PROFESSORIAL ORGANIZERS HOPE THAT THIS PROGRAM WILL HELP CLOSE MAJOR PSYCHOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL GAPS BETWEEN BANGKOK AND THE VILLAGES. THE RTG MIGHT ALSO LIKE TO GET STUDENT LEADERS OUT OF BANGKOK TO PLACES WHERE THEY WILL BE LESS LIKELY TO STIR UP TROUBLE.
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